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*CHRISTIANITY AND MINISTERIAL ORDINATION*<sup>1</sup>

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The Dudleys occupy an honorable place in the history of Harvard University. The first American Dudley was Thomas, second governor of the Massachusetts colony. It was he who signed the original charter of the University in 1642 and the revised charter in 1650. His son Joseph also became governor of the colony, and of him President Josiah Quincy said, "Of all the statesmen who have been instrumental in promoting the interests of Harvard College, Joseph Dudley was most influential in giving its constitution a permanent character." Joseph's son Paul was the founder of this lectureship. He had a judicial career of forty-nine years, for the last six of which he was chief justice of the supreme judicial court. Believing, as he evidently did, that religion was the primary fountain of justice, he chose to show his interest in his college by providing her with funds so that four subjects of great moment to him should be discussed publicly, one every year. There is small wonder that the Validity of Non-episcopal Ordination, which is the subject set for our consideration tonight, should have interested him. While he was a student in college, this question which had hitherto been regarded as settled in Massachusetts colony, at least, was violently reopened. Sir Edmund Andros, the new governor sent by

<sup>1</sup> The Dudleian Lecture, delivered at Harvard University, April 29, 1913, on the following subject, prescribed by the founder, Paul Dudley, in 1750:

"The fourth and last Lecture I would have for the maintaining, explaining, and proving the validity of the ordination of ministers or pastors of the churches, and so their administration of the sacraments or ordinances of religion, as the same hath been practised in New England from the first beginning of it, and so continued at this day. Not that I would any ways invalidate Episcopal Ordination as it is commonly called and practised in the Church of England; but I do esteem the method of ordination as practised in Scotland, at Geneva, and among the Dissenters in England, and in the churches in this country, to be very safe, scriptural, and valid; and that the great Head of the church, by his blessed Spirit, hath owned, sanctified, and blessed them accordingly and will continue so to do to the end of the world. Amen."

James II, had determined to introduce the Church of England into the colony that owed its existence to a conscientious flight from its jurisdiction and to support that church by public taxation. One of the governor's friends, the licenser of the press, wrote to the Bishop of London: "I press for able and sober ministers and we will contribute largely to their maintenance; but one thing will mainly help, when no marriages shall hereafter be allowed lawful but such as are made by the ministers of the Church of England." The sequestration of the property of "factionists" was threatened; at a public funeral there was an open rebellion when the episcopal minister attempted to read the committal service; and it looked as if the war against episcopal pretension and arrogance must once more be fought through. Had Judge Dudley witnessed the expulsion of two colonists for sedition fifty years earlier merely because they insisted upon worshipping according to the rites of the Church of England, his feeling about ecclesiastical arrogance might have been quite different. As it was, however, he retained the sense of the universal horror at the threatened loss of simple and spiritual worship which had clouded the days of his youth until he came to make his last testament. Therein he ordered that at the college which had stood so sturdily for the simple polity of the colonists, there should be delivered once every four years a lecture "for the maintaining, explaining, and proving the validity of the ordination of ministers or pastors of the churches, and so their administration of the sacraments or ordinances of religion, as the same hath been practised in New England from the first beginning of it, and so continued at this day." And the curious fact is that even today it is not altogether unnecessary to defend the liberty of prophesying.

Now not only my immediate predecessors in this lectureship, but a number of other scholars of the highest rank, not only in the mother-country, not only among non-conformists, but among bishops of the Church of England, have made it clear that the ordination-ceremonies in the early church were certainly not those of the Church of England against which Judge Dudley was protesting in the formation of this lectureship, and that the idea of apostolic succession did not arise until the apostles' bodies

had lain in their obscure graves for fully fifty years. But it is by no means so clear that ordination, even of the simple sort of our New England fathers or of that more stereotyped method of the Congregational churches of today, existed in the churches that were founded by the apostles and were governed by the Holy Spirit. The question that should concern us today, I feel, is not so much the validity of non-episcopal ordination as the validity of ordination itself. That episcopal ordination is contrary to the usages of the early and apostolic church seems to me thoroughly established; the question I should like to raise is rather this: Is any sort of ordination contrary to the customs of the early church or inimical to the spirit of Jesus? Underlying even this seemingly fundamental question is, of course, the question regarding the nature and validity of the church,—a question which we shall not be able entirely to evade.

In answering this question concerning the nature and validity of ministerial ordination, so far as light is thrown upon it from the study of the New Testament, we must take our stand upon that wide consensus of New Testament scholarship of our time that differs perceptibly from the consensus of Judge Dudley's time. In his time the court of last resort regarding the validity of any ecclesiastical custom was the New Testament. In our time this is no longer true. Helped largely by the interest in this very question that Judge Dudley lays before us tonight, the scholarship of today appeals for two reasons from that ancient court of last resort. In the first place, it has been shown that the New Testament is not a single book of uniform credibility and authority but a library covering a period of from fifty to a hundred years, and that certain portions of the New Testament are to be preferred to others as witnesses to the practices of the primitive church. And in the second place, we have discovered that the early churches were no more infallible or impeccable than the churches of today, that to find out the custom even of the primitive church is not to find out the right custom, that each age has access to the Spirit of Christ, the final authority of the modern Christian man, and that where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. I shall therefore ask you in the first place to consider with me whether in the utterances of our Lord, or in the

earliest documents of the church, we find any clew to the nature of ministerial ordination, and in the second place to consider its significance and value for to-day.

The earliest entire documents in the New Testament are the early epistles of Paul but those portions at least of the Synoptic gospels probably antedate them which are contained in the Gospel of Mark and in the Logia—that collection of the sayings of our Lord which underlies the present Gospels of Matthew and Luke. The situation reflected in the Pauline letters will be clearer if we consider the place the church occupied in the mind of Jesus, as that mind is revealed by the Synoptic gospels. And we immediately find that Jesus is recorded as speaking of the church only twice. But neither of his utterances about the church comes from either of the two primitive sources of the Synoptics. The sayings are both of them found in the Gospel of Matthew alone, and the authenticity of each is, to say the least, questionable. One of them is almost clearly of later date than Jesus and of a different spirit. Jesus is thereby represented as saying to his disciples: “If thy brother sin against thee, go show him his fault alone or take with thee witnesses that every word may be certified.” “And if he refuse to hear them,” we suddenly read, “tell it unto the church: and if he refuse to hear the church also, let him be unto thee as the Gentile and the publican. Verily I say unto you, What things soever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and what things soever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” “Let him be unto thee as the Gentile and the publican”; but the parable of the pharisee and the publican and Jesus’ treatment of Zacchaeus remind us how foreign to Jesus’ spirit it is to make a publican synonymous with an outcast. One of the most frequent taunts cast at Jesus was that he ate and drank with publicans and sinners. It is therefore scarcely conceivable that in laying down an ecclesiastical rule he should have spoken of them in the accents of a pharisee. Moreover, when he spoke these words, there was no church of any kind which could refuse to hear anybody. There were disciples who went about the lanes of Galilee at the side of Jesus, and who went with him into the synagogue to worship, just as there were disciples of many a Jewish rabbi. The word church comes into

the narrative quite unheralded and unmotivated. The passage at many a point bears earmarks of its late origin, and because it does, it makes us suspicious of the only other passage in which Jesus is represented as even mentioning the word church. This is the famous passage in which he declares that Simon is Peter, and upon that rock will he build his church, and that the gates of hell will not prevail against it. Here indeed the church may be considered as still in the future, and therefore the passage may not necessarily be charged with being an anachronism. Yet there are two reasons which tend to confirm our suspicion of the authenticity of these words. In the first place, they fail in the earlier account of Mark, which has evidently served as the skeleton of this. Moreover, just those words fail, and only those which emphasize the supernatural dignity of the church, a most fatally familiar conception of later times. And in the second place, we are amazed to discover almost precisely the same words which in our former passage were addressed to the disciples in general now addressed to Peter alone. For we read, "I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." This sentence, in anything like an honest interpretation of it, is so completely foreign to the spirit of him who said, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, for of such is the kingdom of heaven," that we cannot seriously reckon with it as a word of the Lord. These two passages, against whose authenticity both external and internal evidence witness, are the only ones in which our Synoptic evangelists represent Jesus as mentioning the church. Both the Gospel of Mark—the earliest gospel—and the Gospel of Luke went out to confirm the certainty of the things wherein Christians had been instructed with no single word from the Lord about his church. It is quite clear, I think, that we cannot regard Jesus as the Founder of the church in any literal sense of that term. The conception seemed foreign to him. He was careless not only about its rites and ordinances but even about it. The Kingdom of God filled his heart; the church is utterly unessential to his discipleship; if it be Christian at all, it is so only because it is a convenient means of establishing the Kingdom of God on earth.

We are confirmed in our conviction that these sayings of Jesus about the church are apocryphal by observing that, according to the early records incorporated in the Acts of the Apostles, the disciples never thought of segregating themselves for worship until the Jews drove them to do so. They worshipped God in the synagogue until that worship was forbidden them and until the development of their hope made it evident that they were completely shut up to another spiritual fellowship. But it is well-nigh inconceivable that this course could have been taken if Christ had really insisted upon the founding of a church.

This omission of direction of Jesus to his disciples about the gathering and ruling of a church explains the situation which meets us in the undoubted letters of Paul, to which we must now briefly turn. In the unquestioned words of the Lord we find no clew whatever to ministerial ordination; there seems to have been nothing to be ordained to: how shall we fare with the earliest datable documents in Christian history, preceding by decades the Gospel of Matthew as it now lies in our hands?

In the early letters of Paul there is absolutely no mention of any kind of ordination. One may read the entire epistles to the Thessalonians and the Galatians and the Corinthians and the Romans and find no mention of any office concerning which the question of the validity of ordination has arisen. Twice the apostle gives a list of the individual activities and services of church-members, but in neither list is a bishop or an elder or a deacon so much as mentioned. To the Romans he writes: "Having gifts differing according to the grace that was given to us, whether prophecy let us prophesy according to the proportion of our faith; or ministry, let us give ourselves to our ministry; or he that teacheth, to his teaching; or he that exhorteth, to his exhorting; he that giveth, let him do it with liberality; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness." In this catalogue the only possible categories under which bishops and deacons could be subsumed are "ministry" and "ruling." If it be "ministry," the word would mock pretensions of lordship; if it be "ruling," it is to be noted that the apostle ranks that particular gift rather low. And it is most likely that under neither rubric did the apostle think of the future lords of the

church. The position of "ruling" between "giving" and "shewing mercy" is quite a clear indication that all three designate private activities of Christians. "Ruling" probably refers to the function of a parent in the home or of a master among his slaves. The catalogue the apostle addressed to the Corinthians is even fuller, but the ordained officers of today have an even poorer chance. The gifts of the Spirit which the apostle mentions are the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, faith, gifts of healings, workings of miracles, prophecy, discernings of spirits, tongues, and interpretation of tongues, and the Christian occupations are enumerated as follows: "God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondly prophets, thirdly teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, divers kinds of tongues." Here, again, only "helps" and "governments" suggest deacons and bishops respectively. "Governments," however, may be translated "wise counsels," and of how little vital importance these two gifts were in the eyes of the church Paul betrays by immediately exhorting the envious Corinthians in these words: "Are all apostles? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles? have all gifts of healings? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret?" It is evident that whatever the somewhat obscure "helps" and "governments" may have been, they were not sufficiently important to be coveted. Indeed, the entire conception of office and officers seems to have been utterly undeveloped. This is noticeable in these very catalogues, where the gifts and those who exercised them are jumbled unceremoniously together, as though the gift were the important thing and as though it might be a transferable grace. When Paul tells the Galatians of his unfortunate introduction to those who were of repute in Jerusalem, he not only declares, "Whatsoever they were, it maketh no matter to me," but proceeds, "God accepteth not man's person," the idea of respecting an office apparently not having dawned upon him.

It is, however, only just to say a word about the possible ordination of the Christian functionaries who are mentioned first in the Corinthian catalogue, namely, the apostles. For while it is at once evident that their office is not that either of the bishop or deacon or pastor of today, it is quite possible to regard them



as holding an office to which ordination is essential. The word "apostle" at once suggests a messenger, and the only earthly body of which an apostle could be a messenger is a Christian gathering. But how much of an official commission an apostle had, or how this commission was bestowed, is now quite obscure. We are certain, however, of three things in connection with the office. First, we know that the word "apostle" did not signify a member of a self-perpetuating board of supernaturally endowed directors of the Christian church. It was not confined to any original twelve. In the Epistle to the Corinthians and in the closing chapter of the Epistle to the Romans there are indications that Paul had no thought of the twelve when he spoke of apostles. The same usage prevails in the Book of Revelation. Even in the Acts, Barnabas as well as Paul is spoken of as an apostle, and in so late a document as the Didache we find a large number of persons spoken of by that term. Secondly, we cannot find that any apostle possessed any official standing in the community by which he may have been commissioned: the word rather suggests that he was qualified as a messenger to other communities, so that if there were any ordination to the apostleship, ordination could not have been regarded as bestowing any authority in the community which ordained. And, thirdly, Paul was most earnest in asseverating, when his apostleship was called in question, that he was an apostle neither from men nor through man but through Jesus Christ. While this asseveration indicates that apostles were at times commissioned by churches or by Christians, it also indicates clearly and unmistakably that Paul did not regard himself as so commissioned, and so did not regard any such commission or putative ordination as essential even to the apostolate. Indeed, the word apostle is used in the Didache interchangeably with the word "prophet," an officer whose ordination can least be assumed. The origins of the function and the nature and source of its possible commission are too obscure for us to say more. But however commissioned customarily, their rights are meagre. It appears that the churches were bound to support them as long as they labored among them, but even this right Paul found of doubtful expediency. He was not able to persuade Apollos to follow his advice, and even Titus simply "accepted his exhorta-

tion." He does speak of setting the practices of the church in Corinth in order when he comes, but it is fair to suppose that he might as well be thinking of the influence that would accrue to the founder of the confused church as of any divine authority. Indeed, he expressly declares to these very Corinthians that he has no lordship over their faith. "We preach not ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake."

As for other officers and their rights, in all the exhortations of these long letters there are only two expressions that hint at them. The Corinthians are urged to be "in subjection unto" the house of Stephanas, the first-fruits of Achaia that "have set themselves to minister unto the saints," but before we have time to wonder at the expression, "be in subjection," the apostle takes the edge off his injunction by adding, "and to every one that helpeth in the work and laboreth." We are further enlightened as to the meaning of the apostle by remembering an injunction in the letter to the Ephesians: "Subjecting yourselves one to another in the fear of Christ." This is not the sort of subjection which could uphold the hierarchical idea. Consequently we are left to wrestle with a single sentence in the first letter to the Thessalonians: "We beseech you to know them that labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them exceeding highly in love for their work's sake." If this sentence stood alone, we might indeed infer the presence of a hierarchy thus early in the life of the church. But as we have seen reason to suppose that all those who were endowed with any kind of spiritual gifts would be considered by the apostle to be "over" the church in those particular functions and services, it seems unnecessary to build so portentous an edifice as an ecclesiastical hierarchy on so unsteady a stone. Moreover, in the very next sentence the apostle turns from these supposed dignitaries to the rank and file of the church to which the letter is addressed, with these words: "And we exhort you, brethren, admonish the disorderly, encourage the fainthearted, support the weak, be longsuffering toward all." Over against this single utterance we may well place the entire spirit of all these letters. It is not in personalities nor in officers nor in ordination nor in churchman-

ship that the apostle puts his mighty trust, but in the gospel that he proclaims. "Though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach unto you any gospel other than that which we preached unto you, let him be anathema." "What, then, is Apollos? and what is Paul? Ministers through whom ye believed." Indeed, the very foundation of Paul's joy lay in his belief that a Christian had escaped from all dominion of men and had entered upon the freedom of the world of the Spirit. "Ye are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you." And Paul was in no doubt as to the manner in which the Spirit of God took possession of a man. The magical or sacramental method never entered into his mind. To him there were only two conceivable ways of salvation. These he mentions to the Galatians in his self-answering question: "This only would I learn from you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law or by the hearing of faith?" Or again, "Christ redeemed us . . . that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." Any man who had received that Spirit by a simple act of faith was removed from the world where the judgments or customs of men counted, or where their authorities could be recognized. To every Christian—bishop (if there were a bishop), prophet, apostle, miracle-worker—his question reached: "Thou, why dost thou judge thy brother?" And to every Christian also reached that other more daring question: "Know ye not that the saints"—those who have received the Spirit of God—"shall judge the world?" How could there have been authoritative ordination in churches ruled by conceptions like these?

And when we come down the century a little further and take up the group of the captivity-epistles of Paul, the result is but little different. Here, again, there is no mention whatever of ordination. It is, indeed, difficult to conceive of the ordination of a prophet or of a man possessed by the gift of tongues. "The lion hath roared, who can but tremble with fear? The Lord Jehovah hath spoken, who can but utter his message?"—that conviction is of the very essence of prophecy. These gifts of the Spirit which were the most widely coveted shut out the idea of ordination; it was, I suppose, as a guard against them that in later times the bishops and deacons were ordained to direct the

churches in their stead. And here in the letter to the Philippians we have the first datable mention of bishops and deacons. Paul addresses perhaps the most unecclesiastical of all his letters to "the church at Philippi with the bishops and deacons." That both words are used in the plural when designating officers of a single local church leads us to premise that the first officer mentioned is rather the present elder than the present bishop. But it is noteworthy that here they emerge from the realm of supposition into the realm of history. It has been cleverly guessed that the reason why Paul sent the letter in part to them and to the deacons was that it was through these officers that the gift was gathered and brought to him for which the letter to the Philippians returns thanks. However that may be, they are not again mentioned in the letter nor in the more churchly letters to the Colossians and to the Ephesians. But even in them the same free atmosphere is about us. The Holy Spirit is given upon faith, no officer is permitted to discipline a brother. No man is to judge another "in meat or in drink or in respect of a feast day or a new moon or a sabbath day." Here the catalogue of functionaries includes only apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. The bishops and deacons are not mentioned, though the pastors appear, and the more primitive gifts of the spirit—miracles and tongues and interpretation of tongues—have disappeared. There are also two sentences in the Epistle to the Ephesians which strike us as a departure from the full freedom of the more undisputed letters of Paul. Instead of the old straightforward declaration, "Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ," we read, "Ye are . . . of the household of God, being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the chief cornerstone." But a more dangerous departure from the spirit of him who said, "Why callest thou me good? none is good save one, even God," is the phrase in the letter to the Ephesians, "holy apostles and prophets." It is only fair, however, to add that in the same letter we read that "each several building groweth into a holy temple in the Lord," and that at a later period we find in one of the Pastoral letters the injunction that the men everywhere "lift up holy hands" in prayer. We cannot therefore say that there is

any insistence in these letters of the captivity upon ordination, least of all upon that ordination which takes a man out of the ranks of his fellows or bestows any special grace or holiness upon him.

When, however, we come down the century still further and touch perhaps the confines of the next, the atmosphere is different. In the Acts of the Apostles and in the Pastoral epistles we seem far away from the vigor and freedom of the early letters of Paul. In the Acts of the Apostles we are dealing with ancient authorities and an editor. We cannot always separate one from the other, and it may be on this ground that we find traces both of the old freedom and also of a more systematized life in the churches, or—perhaps we should say—of church government. Baptism becomes prominent. Prophets retreat behind elders and far behind apostles. The nomenclature indeed is not yet fixed. The elders are once called bishops, and an apostle is said to have not an apostleship but a bishopric. At times the Holy Spirit falls on people in the good old way, but at times it seems to be transmitted through the laying on of the apostles' hands. Not even here is the Holy Ghost confined to the good offices of an apostle, to say nothing of a bishop, but there are some startling accounts. Not only did some Ephesians who were baptized into John's baptism and had never heard of the Holy Spirit receive the same when Paul, happening that way, laid his hand upon them, but men who had believed Philip and had been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus, received the Holy Spirit only after Peter and John had prayed for them and laid their hands upon them. Even Paul did not receive the Holy Ghost until Ananias, to whom curiously Paul never alludes, lays his hands upon him. This transmission of the Holy Spirit through the hands of good men as well as through their words may not, of course, necessarily imply any sacerdotal powers. But it is to be noted that just at this time also we begin to have records of ordination. We are told that in the earliest days of the church the apostles laid their hands upon seven men elected by the church and thus set them apart for the service of tables. We are fortunately told, however, that one of the men on whom these hands were laid was full of the Holy Ghost before the sacred ceremony. Barnabas

and Paul too, though both already full of the Holy Ghost, were separated by certain prophets and teachers for an apostleship to certain regions near, by a revelation and by the laying on of hands. Church government begins to have at least the first hint of authority. Paul and Barnabas "appoint elders for every church," and Paul delivers to the churches "the decrees which had been ordained of the apostles and elders at Jerusalem,"—decrees, by the way, which Paul, speaking to the Galatians of the same conference, never mentions. But, ecclesiastical as is the atmosphere in the Acts, it is, I think, still more marked in the Pastoral letters, which modern scholarship is more and more widely denying to Paul. Here the catalogue of functionaries in the churches is quite different from those in the letters to the Romans and Corinthians and Ephesians. We hear no word of a prophet. Bishops and deacons and widows bulk large instead. Their qualifications, harmless and Christian enough, are given in great detail. Titus is bidden to reprove with authority and to appoint elders in every city. We hear for the first time of the "washing of regeneration," afterward so emphasized in John. But, most noteworthy of all, "Paul" writes to Timothy about his ordination in most dubious language. He seems to refer to it five times. Once he speaks of "prophecies which led the way to thee," as though some prophet had chosen him for his office of evangelist by a free word of the Lord. Again he bids Timothy: "Neglect not the gift that is in thee which was given thee by prophecy and by the laying on of the hands of the presbytery." Even here, however, the free word of prophecy has its part to play in the ordination. But at still another time "Paul" does not scruple to charge Timothy to "stir up the gift of God that is in thee through the laying on of my hands." Here certainly an unprejudiced rendering of the words would seem to imply that spiritual gifts were dependent upon apostolic ordination. It is true that all these three passages seem to refer to the same event, and that, after a prophet had selected Timothy by revelation for the work of an evangelist, the elders and "Paul" laid their hands upon him and ordained him to that office, but it is a fact that this last expression is contained in a different letter from the others and seems to convey a different theory of the event. It may indeed

be a shift of the apostle's memory, but whatever it is, it would appear as if, at the time the second letter to Timothy was written in its present form, the sacerdotal conception was no longer an impossibility. The letter is full of offices and of induction into those offices of which the earliest Christian documents betray no knowledge. The emphasis has certainly changed, and in spiritual things a change of emphasis betokens a change of living and of believing.

These are facts, and are far surer than any explanation of them. And yet it does not seem difficult to guess the reason for this shifting of emphasis from the freedom of the spirit to the orderliness and statutoriness of ordination and systematic church government. It was already necessary at the earliest time to warn the Thessalonians, who were themselves expecting the coming of the Lord, not to despise prophesying, and it was a hard matter to straighten out the tangles in which the freedom of prophecy had involved the Corinthians. As it seemed so impossible to keep the spirits of the prophets and the ecstasies subject to them, the churches began to desire them to be subject to more ordinary men. And as prophecy sank in favor, the atmosphere in which it thrived disappeared. Gradually churches found themselves without prophets, and the bishops (elders, as we would call them) and deacons performed their tasks. In the early *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* we find it enjoined to give the first-fruits to the prophets, "but if ye have no prophet, give them to the poor." And a few sentences farther on we read: "Appoint for yourselves bishops and deacons worthy of the Lord; for they too render you the service of the prophets and teachers. Despise them not therefore." It is interesting to observe that the Greek word *χειροτονέω*, which here seems to have its earlier meaning of "appoint," is the very word which later was employed in the signification of "ordain." Thus upon these bishops and deacons, the parts of the body of Christ which were thought to be less honorable, upon them was soon bestowed the "more abundant honor" of ordination. As the financial questions, moreover, grew more important, and as the eucharist became the central service of the church, these less conspicuously spiritual offices became the most necessary of all. An elder or

bishop could preside at the Lord's Supper as worthily as a prophet, and could administer the church funds with greater acceptance. It is not surprising if eventually the apparent spiritual defect of these offices was made good by the service of ordination, to which an increasingly sacerdotal significance became attached for purposes of honor and discipline.

To sum up the historical facts regarding ordination. Our Lord founded no church and commissioned no church-officers. The one command savoring of church-problems which he gave those nearest him was: "Be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your teacher, and all ye are brethren. And call no man your father on the earth; for one is your Father, the heavenly."<sup>2</sup> The earliest Christian documents contain no allusion to ordination, nor to those officers who afterward claimed divine powers on its account. Not until the second century do we assuredly come upon a contemporaneous witness to the ceremony of ordination, and even then its sacerdotal quality is but little emphasized. Surely the question is in place, Is any ordination valid in the Christian church?

As this, however, is a question not of history but of spiritual predilection and temperament, brief suggestions rather than a closely knit argument are in place. We ask, therefore, whether ordination fits those Christian officers who are customarily ordained today for the functions now expected of them. We expect them to marry men and women; but even Christians recognize as lawful marriages which are performed by the state. We expect them to bury the dead; but what church would forbid any of its members from reading a committal service? Must a captain at sea be ordained for that purpose? We expect them to preach the gospel; but how often is the gospel preached as effectively by laymen! To ordain a man as a necessary qualification for preaching would be to outlaw both the Old and the New Testament prophets and many a successful evangelist. We expect them to baptize; but even the Roman Catholics allow this to be done in necessitous circumstances by lay Christians. We

<sup>2</sup> This cannot, however, be absolutely relied upon as a genuine word of our Lord. While far more primitive in its phrasing than the sayings of our Lord upon the church, which we have already considered, it comes to us from the Gospel of Matthew alone.



expect them to pray; but they certainly have no exclusive rights in prayer. The only service which is still widely withheld from laymen is the conduct of the Lord's Supper. But certainly that service is no more sacred than baptism or prayer. The presiding person at the feast seemed of such little importance to the apostle Paul, or even to the writer of the Acts, that it is impossible to say who it was. Only those who see some kind of pharmacological significance in the Lord's Supper can logically demand a specifically ordained person to distribute it. But to see such significance is to depart from the truth as it is in Jesus.

No one can believe in the freedom of the Spirit as Jesus and Paul believed in it and believe in a peculiar and saving sacramental grace. If the Spirit is supplied by the hearing of faith, if a child can repose on the love of God before it has ever sat at the Lord's table, if the teaching of Jesus is still regarded as a sufficient standard of faith, then sacramentalism is false. And any ordination that is supposed to convey a peculiar grace or an exclusive right to preside at the table of the Lord is a delusion, and is dangerously near being an enemy of the gospel. Much more in accord with the earliest practice of the church, and at first sight at least more conducive to the rule of the Spirit, would it be to do away completely with ordination of Christian ministers, as we have happily done away with ordination of Christian deacons. But is it necessary for us to follow the example of the Quakers and of the Separatists and do away with ordination altogether? We should, if we regard the act of ordination as conferring necessary grace; if we would define it with the Century Dictionary as the rite of investing with ministerial or sacerdotal power and authority. We need not, if we regard the act of ordination as a public recognition of grace. The service of ordination does in the church precisely what a degree does in a college. It testifies to the church at large that in the opinion of the representatives of a group of churches a certain man understands and reveres the gospel and the Lord sufficiently to preach them. It is a certificate of standing. And so it aids the churches in securing Christian men to perform functions for which Christian men are necessary. But such ordination should no more prevent other Christians from performing those same Christian

functions in churches where they are personally known than the absence of a college diploma should prohibit a scholar from writing and teaching. In my own opinion the Christianity of our churches would be considerably purified and deepened if the churches should choose from their own number an unordained and earnest Christian to preside at the sacred service of the Lord's Supper, a service no more sacred, however, than any reverent service of prayer.

For, after all, the church is an institution in a realm where institutions are bound to be inadequate. Only as every church recognizes its fundamental inadequacy can it do its work with the least fatal consequences. The church represents order in a realm where order seems utterly presumptuous. The very immensity of its task should keep it reverently fearful of everything systematic and stereotyped. The church is committed to a task which can never be committed to it. The moment it presumes to confine the Spirit of God in the bounds of its ceremonies, that moment the Spirit of God departs from it. For the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. High walls can keep out the Spirit of God, but they cannot hold the Spirit in. So long as the church held a semi-pagan view of redemption, so long could it consistently demand a pagan order of priests to perform it. For centuries the church identified redemption with everlasting life. This life was to be ingrafted upon our mortality by drugging our flesh with infusions of the body of Christ. This body was obtainable only through the sacraments of the church. And the sacraments were dependent for their efficacy upon the special grace bestowed upon the administrators of the same in the sacred service of ordination. But ordination, as a requisite for the performance of ministerial functions, stands or falls with this ancient semi-pagan theory of redemption. *When a man comes to believe that redemption consists in taking the filial attitude toward God and the brotherly attitude toward men, then ordination as an indispensable qualification for any Christian service becomes an impertinence.* By whom was Christ ordained? And whom did He ordain? When a man, through reverent trust in Jesus, makes His attitude to God and man his own, he has become a king and priest to God. No

ordination can give him more than an opportunity for the exercise of that priesthood that his faith has already bestowed upon him. The higher and more spiritual is our conception of redemption, the higher and more spiritual will be our conception of the task of the church. For the task of the church is nothing else than to spread the good news of redemption and to maintain in the world a fellowship founded on the glad experience of redemption. But when we define redemption as Jesus revealed it, that moment the church becomes simply one of God's agents in preparing the way for that supreme spiritual act which is consummated between God and each individual soul. All orders fall away, save as matters of convenience. There is but one order, as but one reward, in the Christian church. Whether a man comes to it at the first or at the eleventh hour, whether he works in it as Sunday-school teacher, or bishop, or reverent worshipper and obscure disciple, he receives the one order and the one reward; he comes into conscious spiritual communion with the Most High God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. "So then neither is he that planteth anything, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase." "There can be neither Jew nor Greek," neither ordained nor unordained, "there can be neither bond nor free, there can be no male and female: for ye all are one in Christ Jesus."